



and
TV Guide
The Wilkoff Group

The Booker T. Washington Center

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The Booker T. Washington Center

Elkhart never has had a community center quite like it

by Arden Erickson



HERBERT M. TOLSON, executive director for the Booker T. Washington Center in Elkhart for its last 15 years.

THERE NEVER has been a community center in Elkhart quite like the Booker T. Washington Center.

For several decades it touched the lives and served the people of the near south side unlike anything before or after.

From the cradle to old age, the BTW Center was the focus of community life in the predominantly black neighborhood now sometimes known as Benham West.

It was in the name of Benham West, in fact, that the building which housed the BTW for so many years was torn down last month. The house at 409 St. Joseph St. had been a home the last 18 years for John and Elnora Robinson. It was purchased by the Department of Redevelopment for clearance in the renewal program in that neighborhood.

The Robinsons had purchased the house in July, 1957, from the board of the Booker T. Washington Center, which by then was an organization rather than a place. The center itself was closed "temporarily" in February, 1956, following the resignation on Feb. 9, that year of the director, Herbert M. Tolson.

What was to have been temporary became permanent, and the doors of the Booker T. Washington Center never opened again as such, thus ending a 35-year institution.

... MANY NAMES were connected with the center from the time of its creation in 1921 by a group of women from the WCTU (Women's Christian Temperance Union) until it was closed.

But the man who was the last director of the center when it was a "community center" probably remembers as much as anyone about the BTW. Herb Tolson and his wife, Ruth, ran the place for 15 years, from January of 1941 to February of 1956.

They became the friends of hundreds of people who passed through Booker T. Washington, many of whom thought of it as a second home. Some Elkhartans who grew up here say it was more of a home for some even than their "real" home.

Herb and Ruth Tolson now live at 3601 S. Nappanee St. and reminisced recently about how it was in the days of the Booker T. Washington Center.

One off-hand comment Tolson made seem to tell a lot: he remembers that sometimes during the war years when a serviceman came home on furlough, the first place he'd come after getting off the train or bus was the center. Why?

... PERHAPS his mother had taken a younger brother or sister to the well baby clinic which the Tolsons set up at the center; a doctor and nurse would examine infants and children periodically.

Or maybe the younger brother or sister attended the nursery school which the Tolsons organized. "We had 30 to 40 kids every day," Tolson recalls. (Tolson and his wife were the only paid staff at the center, funded by the Community Chest which later was called the United Fund and is now the United Way.) They could not have done all they did without the volunteers from the community who helped.

It was the volunteers who also staffed the Bible school at the center during the summers, when there always were more than 200 students, Tolson said. "The teachers were the people of the community."

Perhaps the returning soldier, or in some later cases the college student coming home on vacation, came to the center because they had been involved in one of the clubs at the center.

... THERE WERE clubs for boys and girls, teen-age clubs, clubs for young adults and married women, the Dollar Club for men in the middle years and another group of clubs for senior citizens. There also were the Boy Scouts and Girl Scouts and Y Teens.

Tolson remembers one occasion when the Boy Scout troop sponsored by the center wanted to go camping in Michigan. They had no gear — much of the equipment at the center was donated — and Tolson went to the local Army recruiter for help.

The recruiter had no such supplies but he made a few phone calls, and a lieutenant and

two sergeants from Fort Campbell drove up in an Army truck full of tents and sleeping bags; they went to Michigan with the troop and set up the tents; when the camp-out was over they came back and picked up the tents and gear.

Tolson remembers that as an example of the cooperation and help the center received from the community at-large.

There were other clubs. The Minutemen's Club for young boys; The Dukes for older boys, and the Girl's Reserves. They became vital to the life of the center, but none of them more so than the athletic clubs. Here, the BTW often shone, consistently winning championships in various sports.

Tolson said that the softball and Golden Gloves teams from the Elkhart BTW won many city and Northern Indiana championships.

... THE CENTER sponsored many seasonal and annual events. "The children came by the hundreds to our Halloween parties," Tolson said, "from all over the city." The Fire Department would rope off St. Joseph Street from Maryland to Hickory to block traffic.

The firemen also put up a greased pole every year, with a \$5 bill at the top for the winner. There was every kind of game imaginable to play, Tolson said, and the children always helped to clean up the area after the party.

The children were so darned orderly, Tolson claims, that he had to egg them on sometimes to promote a little good, clean window-sdapping.

There were Christmas parties every year ... always overloaded, Tolson says. Mrs. Tolson remembers pep parades and skating parties at the rink above the old A & P Store building off North Main or at Playland Park in South Bend.

Mrs. Tolson especially remembers some of the dances sponsored by the girls clubs at the center. Her most beautiful memory, she says, is of a dance at the YW in 1945. "Three Twinkling Hours."

"Herb was in the Navy then." (He served in 1944 and 1945. Tolson had been on the local draft board before he was drafted. "Something went wrong," is the way he put it.) Mrs. Tolson said that dance was the first time many of the boys and girls ever went formal.

"Quiz Night" was another big night at the center. Once a week the young people would try to stump each other with questions much like the radio program popular then.

... NEIGHBORHOOD BOYS used to play basketball at the center every day. For a long time, Tolson said, they only had a dirt court. The local Kiwanis with Harold Borneman spearheaded a drive to put up goals and have the playground blacktopped.

(City Councilman William Martin remembers that, for some time after the center was closed and sold to the Robinsons as a home, they kept up the basketball court and playground for use by the neighborhood children.)

The newly surfaced playground was great for basketball, of course, but it led to another event which became one of the highlights of summer activities at the center ... outdoor movies. "Every Friday night," Tolson said, "we showed movies on the basketball court; everybody came to watch westerns or whatever and eat popcorn. You couldn't find room to park," he said, "and kids were hanging from the trees to look at the movies."

Besides all these and other events at the Booker T. Washington Center, it filled another need. It was just a place ... a place where a kid could go after school or in the evening and relax or meet with friends.

And there usually was a cop or two around, Tolson said. They would come by in their off-duty hours to hit some buckets, shoot some pool or play checkers with whoever was there. He particularly remembers former city policeman Roger Kendall, who came to the center almost every day. "Always whistling," is the way Tolson and everyone else in town

Continued on next page



THE Y-TEENS at the BTW Center usually had a Valentines Day Dance. Appearing here (from left) are: Front row, Lulu Anderson, Verna Hansborough, Marilyn Atkins, Ethel Lee Irving and Onida Owens; in the back are Mrs. Mable Monteith, BTW Center board member, Barbara Jean Burson, Gloria Smith, Mrs. Herbert Tolson, Albertha Washington, Imogene Hilliard, Joyee Phillips, unidentified, and Anna Jane Atkins.



MRS. HERBERT TOLSON appears with one of the graduating classes of the pre-school nursery conducted at the Booker T. Washington Center. The nursery school and a summer Bible school were regular events at the center while Mrs. Tolson and her husband, Herb, directed the activities there from 1941 to 1956.



BOOKS

Harry Golden beams wit and warmth

LONG LIVE COLUMBUS.
By Harry Golden. Putnam.
266 Pages. \$8.95.

The wit and warmth which first captured readers in "Only in America" shines through once again in Harry Golden's latest book, a charming collection of more than 180 pieces, ranging from paragraphs to essays, and provocatively titled "Long Live Columbus."

The phrase, according to Golden, was one used by immigrant Jews on New York's Lower East Side. To them, Columbus was the man who opened the way to a new and better land than the ones they had left behind. So when something good happened, the immigrants were quick

to say, "Leben zul Columbus."

Golden's description of the origin of the phrase along with his musings as to whether Columbus was Jewish are just a bit of the many amiable thoughts he put forward in this book. The book abounds with humor but sprinkled thoughtfully throughout are numerous philosophical musings, ranging from using the mind — "A man is like a tree; he dies on top first." — to growing old — "What makes age bearable is the expectation we are going to see how some things turn out." — to inflation — "When I was a boy, a hot dog cost three cents, and that included

mustard and relish. Now they cost 50 cents, but they taste no better."

Golden is not, of course, all sweetness and light. He strikes out fiercely at such blotches on society's face as racial discrimination and anti-Semitism, but he does not roar, preferring instead to make his points logically and, if possible, with a touch of humor. What he has to say often may seem frothy on the surface, but it is most substantial underneath.

SAMUEL JOHNSON. By John Wain. Viking. 388 Pages. \$12.50.

John Wain, professor of poetry at Oxford, critic, poet and novelist, has attempted a sympathetic and interesting biography of Samuel Johnson and set it in the larger picture of England in the day of the famous "Dictionary."

"There is," Wain writes in a note on sources at the end of this well-written and interesting volume, "no research in this book. Every fact it contains was previously known to scholars, and to any reader who kept abreast of scholarship."

Born in the same part of England as Johnson, brought up in many of the same traditions, Wain is sympathetic to Johnsonian ideals. He writes with delight of Johnson's interest in science and literature, his

joy in conversation and his "club" of friends. He tells of Johnson's unhappy childhood and of the author's relationship with Hester Thrale, who betrayed Johnson's confidence and eventually wrote about him.

Wain relies on James Boswell's "Life of Johnson," although critical of Boswell's interpretation of many facets of the writer. He includes an understanding look at Johnson's eccentricities, and at the paradox of his character. Wain finds Johnson unappreciated in modern times, and obviously hopes to rectify that error with this work of popular scholarship.

THE ROYAL HOUSE OF WINDSOR. By Elizabeth Longford. Knopf. 288 Pages. \$15.

That there is still much to be said for a monarchy, whom the people genuinely like, is demonstrated amply by the distinguished biographer Elizabeth Longford in this relatively short account of Britain's reigning family. While highly readable, it is much less ambitious for a writer of Lady Longford's stature than her studies of Queen Victoria and the Duke of Wellington.

It should be explained that the House of Windsor is a relatively recent, even arbitrary, designation. When the Stuart line died out with

Queen Anne in 1714, their cousins, the Hanoverians, were called over from Germany under George I. Hanover they remained until Queen Victoria married Prince Albert, whose family name was Coburg. In the anti-Germanism of World War I, King George V, very reluctantly and only after pressure inside and outside Parliament, officially changed the family name, appropriately enough to Windsor after their very English and oldest feudal castle, dating back to William the Conqueror.

Lady Longford's book is a lively account of the family from George V to his favorite grandchild, Queen Elizabeth II. In between we get some sharp etchings of the semitragic Edward VIII, later the Duke of Windsor, and the woman he loved, Wallis Warfield Simpson; and Edward's brother and Queen Elizabeth's father, George VI, who did not really want the throne but assumed it dutifully and served bravely and even inspiringly in World War II.

All of these have not hesitated to live up to George V's axion when crises demanded: the monarch is the only British statesman never out of office. The elegant pictures — color, black and white, and cartoons — cannot overshadow Lady Longford's lively prose.

By Helen Fusilo

ACROSS

- 1 Wheat or rye
- 5 Fireplace left-overs
- 10 Harmony
- 15 Political group
- 19 Israeli folk dance
- 20 Variety of wheat
- 21 Fifth of Clyde island
- 22 Parker House item
- 23 Jewish month
- 24 Stage in a cycle
- 25 "I — Say No"
- 26 Western campus: Abbr.
- 27 Postpone
- 29 Oxlike antelope
- 31 Sea monster
- 33 Transmission part
- 35 Ungentlemanly person
- 37 Holy: I-v.
- 38 Riddle word
- 41 Helmsman
- 43 But: Lat.
- 44 Youth org.
- 47 Bother
- 48 Great pleasure
- 50 Monetary unit
- 52 Clumsy
- 53 Garden growth
- 54 Region, divided into three parts

- 56 Capacious
- 57 Sweater eater
- 58 Rustic vehicle
- 59 Dues payer
- 61 Chicken snake
- 62 Type of chart
- 63 Rabbit fur
- 64 Stimulate
- 65 Boxer George
- 67 Bluefin
- 68 Fashions
- 69 Natterjack
- 70 Conventional
- 73 Salt lake of Asia
- 74 Populous place
- 75 Mayday!
- 78 Tropical shrub genus
- 79 — just as pure and fair

- 100 Social wrap
- 101 Royal pleasure-boat
- 102 Courtly manner
- 106 Artistic works
- 108 Misplay
- 112 Flutellike instrument
- 113 Sectors
- 115 Originate
- 117 Khartoum's river
- 118 Stakeout
- 119 Hockey scores
- 120 Goncrist's sister
- 121 Fencing blade
- 122 Intimate
- 123 Enroll
- 124 Produce
- 125 Distribute

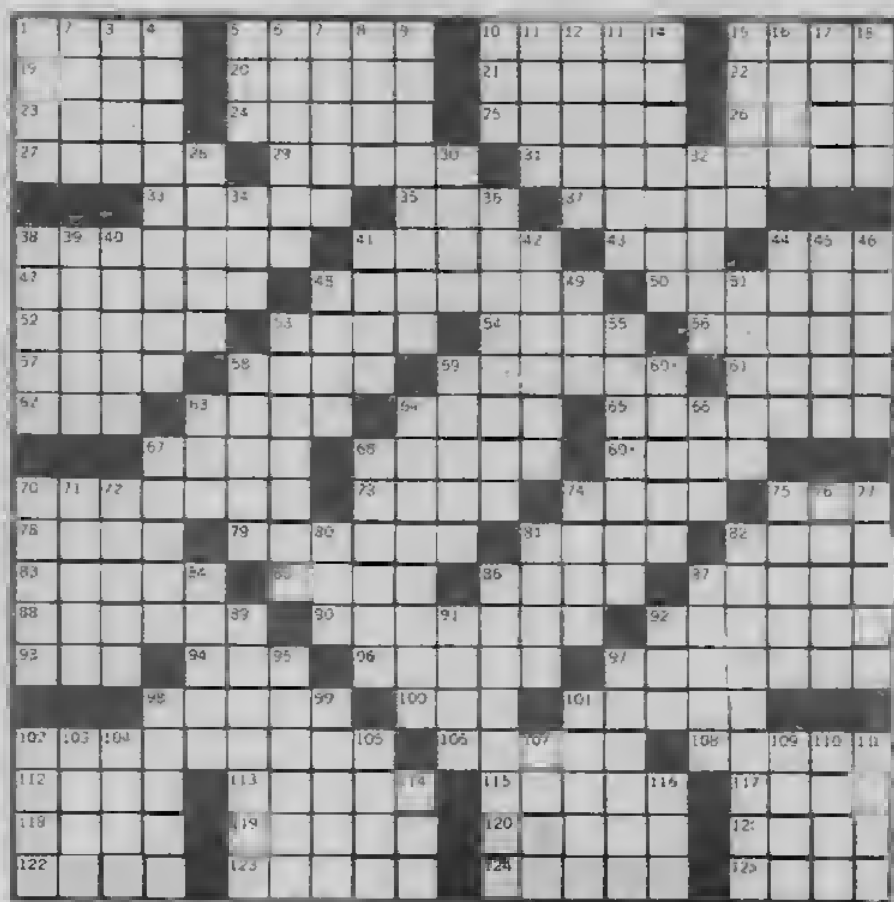
- Maryland
- 17 Mexican pot
- 18 Wearers of a similar tarian
- 28 What makes a loaf rise
- 30 Spanish surrealist
- 32 Zeal
- 34 Classified items
- 36 Jingle
- 38 Gorilla's relative, for short
- 39 Saigon's rival
- 40 Alpine ridge
- 41 Nuisance
- 42 Maidenhead's river
- 44 Actress Claire
- 45 Brazilian dance
- 46 European
- 48 Small skiff
- 49 Transport for three men
- 51 Having earlike appendages
- 53 Sea cow
- 55 Radical
- 58 Spiral-shelled mollusk
- 59 King of Phrygia
- 60 Grubs
- 63 Signal
- 64 Stronghold
- 66 Bolger
- 67 Distinguishing feature
- 68 Place to park a yacht
- 70 Harvest goddess
- 71 Quarter-

- round molding
- 72 V-shaped fieldwork
- 74 African nut tree
- 75 Ballet step
- 76 Harmonium
- 77 Exhausted
- 80 Pierre's pal
- 81 Precipitation
- 82 Solicitous
- 84 Where Hercules slew the lion
- 86 Museum pieces
- 87 Buffalo's home
- 89 Seaman's personal effects
- 91 Nothing: Fr.
- 92 Douglas, for example
- 95 Married woman
- 97 Feudal-tenant
- 98 Hibernated
- 99 Pay the bill
- 101 Hosiery shade
- 102 Ancient Teuton
- 103 Hillside dugout
- 104 Temporary possession
- 105 New Haven university
- 107 Three: Ger.
- 109 Ready for harvest
- 110 Olive genus
- 111 Virginia dance
- 114 Russian political entity: Abbr.
- 116 Outcome

DOWN

- 1 Large lake in Africa
- 2 Floated
- 3 Spoken
- 4 Brief news item
- 5 Horned viper
- 6 Planet
- 7 Restores
- 8 "Born Free" heroine
- 9 Mimeo masters
- 10 Felt shoe worn inside boots
- 11 Epochal
- 12 Astrological sign
- 13 Boxing ring floor
- 14 Tempted
- 15 "Et tu, —"
- 16 — Raven,

A.M.'s Crossword Puzzle



Answer on Page 11


NEW on the shelves

at Elkhart's Public Library

- FICTON**
- A Glimpse of Paradise, Arlene Hale
- Knight's Acre, Norah Lofts
- The Physicians; A Novel of Malpractice, Henry Denker
- Summer's Lease, Celia Lerner
- SUSPENSE**
- The Man in the Sopwith Camel, Michael Butterworth
- Skull Still Bone, John Wyllie
- WESTERN**
- Kinch, Matthew Braun
- Texas Gold, John Reese
- BELIEFS**
- The Mystics, Aubrey Menen
- The Way of the Sacred, Francis Huxley
- SCIENCE**
- Continents in Motion; The New Earth Debate, Walter Sullivan
- Mars, Patrick Moore
- A Random Walk in Science; An Anthology, compiled by R. L. Weber
- HEALTH AND SAFETY**
- Diabetes as a Way of Life; third edition, T. S. Danowski
- Safety; Principles, Instruction, and Readings, Alton L. Thygerson
- ARDUND HDME**
- Country Fair Cookbook; Every Recipe a Blue Ribbon Winner, edited by Elise W. Manning

- The Food-Lover's Garden, Angelo M. Pellegrini
- Recipes for Home Repair, Alvin Ubell
- Sewing with the New Knits; Today's Techniques for Today's New Fabrics, Phyllis W. Schwebke
- CHILD CARE**
- Toddlers and Parents; A Declaration of Independence, T. Berry Brazelton
- When Children Ask About Sex; A Guide for Parents, Joae Graham Selzer
- ARTS AND CRAFTS**
- The Art of the Japanese Kite, Tal Streeter
- The How and Why of Chinese Painting, Diana Kan
- How to Create Your Own Designs; An Introduction to Color, Form and Composition, Dona Z. Meilach
- How to Make Cornhusk Dolls, Ruth Wendorff
- SPDRTS AND GAMES**
- Big Wall Climbing, Doug Scott
- The World of Chess, Anthony Saily
- The World's Number One, Flat-Out, All-Time Great, Stock Car Racing Book, Jerry Bledsoe
- BIOGRAPHY**
- Actor: The Life and Times of Paul Muni, Jerome Lawrence
- Dur Friend, Jacques Maritain; A Personal Memoir, Julie Korman

- Verdi, Joseph Wechsberg
- TRAVEL AND HISTDRY**
- The Best of England, Garry Hogg
- England's Green and Pleasant Land, Kate Simon
- Fodor's Portugal, 1975, edited by Eugene Fodor
- Land of the Inland Seas; The Historic and Beautiful Great Lakes Country, William Donohue Ellis
- Line of Departure: Tarawa, Martin Russ
- Many Winters; Prose and Poetry of the Pueblos, Nancy Wood
- Royalty on Horseback, Judith Campbell
- The Sword and the Scrimtar; The Saga of the Crusades, Ernie Bradford
- The Twenties, Alan Jenkins



DAVID WENGER
HERE TO HELP YOU HEAR
Elkhart 523-5525



BTW director Herb Tolson (below) and the late Clarence Williams (right) pose with the 1941 Truth-sponsored Golden Gloves champions. From second left are Elbert Lewis, Lovell Anderson and O.T. Donaldson. In the picture at right "Speed" Campbell referees a match between BTW boxer Charles Gill (right) and an unidentified partner.



Booker T. Washington Center: over the years, changes . . .

Elkhart's Booker T. Washington Center underwent a number of transformations in its lifetime here.

It was first organized in 1921 by a group from the Women's Christian Temperance Union and was located in the 800 block of South Sixth Street. The first worker for the organization, then known as the Colored Community Center, was Mrs. Martha McCurdy.

The name of the center was changed to the Booker T. Washington Settlement House in 1924. Prior to Mrs. McCurdy's resignation in 1929, the group moved its headquarters to the 1300 block of Sixth and the name was changed to the Booker T. Washington Community Center.

For a while a Mrs. Vandervilt was the director. In 1939 the center was moved to 409 St. Joseph St. and Mrs. Bessie Triggs, a native of Cleveland, became executive director, resigning in 1940.

Herbert M. Tolson began serving as executive director in January, 1941, the post he held until resigning in February, 1956. Following Tolson's resignation, the center was closed the same month.

THE CLOSING was to have been temporary, pending a survey to determine

the center's future program of community service according to the board president then, the Rev. Edgar Prasse.

An earlier (1954) survey had indicated the need for a new, larger facility, but the second survey resulted in the permanent closing of the building.

It had been determined that "the Negro should be integrated into all of the agencies of the community and into the entire community." The board had decided to go from a building-centered program to a community-centered program.

The building was sold and the furnishings auctioned.

The Booker T. Washington Center as an organization continued to function, however, and a new executive director was hired in October of 1956; he was Edward W. Allen. He operated out of 409 St. Joseph St. until the house was sold, and new offices were set up at 209 S. Second St.

Then, after several years of planning by community leaders and the center's board, the Booker T. Washington Center was officially accepted as a member of the National Urban League on Feb. 11, 1963.

It was announced then that the BTW Center will henceforth be known as the Elkhart Urban League.



THE BTW SOFTBALL team won the city championship on more than one occasion. In this picture Charles Gill of the team accepts a trophy from an unidentified girl. Team members (from left) are: Front row, Harold Burson, Sylvester Barnes, Robert Ursery, Norris Jackson, deceased, and Junior Goldsmith; in the back are Lovell Anderson, Isaac Shaw, Herb Tolson, Benny DeBolt, Ambice Rice, Mr. Hankins, John Britt and Gill.

Continued . . .

remembers Kendall, who now lives in Florida and is ill with cancer.

...TOLSON THINKS that a community center such as Booker T. could still serve a definite need in the community. Its drop-in anytime feature alone was invaluable, he believes.

And the boys and girls pretty much took care of themselves and each other. Tolson said that often if a young person from the community got in trouble the police or school officials would turn him or her over to the center for discipline by the membership.

If someone insisted on being a repeat offender they would face banishment from the center, and in those days that was a blow.

The greatest testimony to the center, Tolson believes, are the people who passed through. He is proud of those who "grew up" in the center and then became doctors, lawyers, bankers, professional athletes, businessmen, policemen, teachers, nurses, musical talents or just citizens.

He was especially afraid to begin listing names . . . "there are just so many, so many."

... HERB AND RUTH Tolson came to Elkhart from Detroit, where they had been employed by the Urban League to work with young people. They met earlier when both were working in Civilian Conservation Corps (CCC) camps in the Midwest. He was an education advisor and she was a teacher.

Both are natives of Missouri. Tolson graduated from Lincoln University there with an AB degree. He then earned a master's degree from the Y. W. Y. School of Social Work.

Though born in Missouri, Mrs. Tolson grew up in Kansas and was graduated from Parsons Junior College and the University of Kansas. Her first job was on a government project in Parsons, and then she took a teaching post at Fort Riley, Kan., where she and Herb met.

Tolson said he and his wife resigned from the center because the work load became too great. They were the only staff for many years, though an office girl and janitor were hired in the later years.

During the last two years he was there Tolson began efforts to have the center affiliated with the National Urban League, but there were insufficient finances to effect the merger then.

... A 1954 SURVEY reported that the center had outgrown its facilities and a new one was needed. The National Federation of Settlements was to make another study in 1955 and then a building committee was to be appointed.

It never came to pass, and with the Tolsons' resignations in 1956, the center's doors closed.

In fact, there never has been a community center in Elkhart anything like the Booker T. Washington Center.



HALLOWEEN PARTIES at the Booker T. Washington Center used to attract hundreds of children, but they all could not get in the range of the camera at one time. The loss of some trophies and records after the center was closed has made it impossible to date some of the pictures appearing in AM.



ELKHART used to have a window decorating contest every Christmas season. Mrs. Herbert Tolson admires her own art work at the Booker T. Washington Center which won in the 1946 contest.

Since BTW . . .

Herbert and Ruth Tolson of 3601 S. Nappanee St., directors for 15 years of the former Booker T. Washington Center in Elkhart, have not been idle since their resignations from the center in 1956.

Mrs. Tolson, now 62, stayed home for awhile to raise their son and daughter, Herbert Jr. and Princess Ruth. For the last 10 years, however, she has been a caseworker out of the Gushen office of the Elkhart County Welfare Department.

After leaving the center, Tolson worked a few months at the Post Office here and then took a job as a parole officer for the state, working out of Gary.

The driving to Gary became tiresome and Tolson went to work for the St. Joseph County Welfare Department. He retired from there in September, 1974, after 18 years. Now 65, he works part-time one to four hours a day.

more on next two pages



ONE OF the Halloween parties at the BTW was too much for little Mary Whiner, who fell asleep after filling her decorated gift sack with treats.